

The Cowboy's Gear

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Grade Level: 3, 4, 5, 6

Subject: U.S. History, Math, Social Studies, Language Arts, Art/Music

Duration: 1 hour with extensions available

Description: The purpose of this lesson is to give students an awareness of cowboy life.

Goals: Students will gain knowledge of a true historic cowboy.

Objectives:

1. Students will learn about authentic cowboy clothing and the purpose of each article.
2. Students will be introduced to the equipment used by cowboys on a daily basis (tack).
3. The students will learn about the cost of equipment and how the cowboy needed to manage their wages well in order to purchase the equipment.

Materials:

1. Cowboys (Read and Color Book)
2. I See by Your Outfit by Tom Lindmier and Steve Mount
3. The Montana Cowboy by Patrick Dawson
4. Cobblestone- America's Cowboys: A History
5. The Cowboy at Work by Fay E. Ward

Optional Resources:

1. Wee Sing Around the Campfire
2. Pictures in Grant-Kohrs Ranch Trunk
3. Cowboy Clothing -Grant-Kohrs Trunk
4. My First Book of Cowboy Songs by Dolly M. Moon
5. Cowboys by Philip Silcott

Vocabulary:

1. Pants- sturdy canvas; brown, black or tan; Levi Strauss made denim jeans by importing material from France and dyeing it blue. Pants had one small waist pocket, or no pockets because it was difficult to reach items in the pockets and uncomfortable to sit in a saddle all day with them full. Belt loops were not added until much later, so suspenders had to hold the pants up and buttons sewn on the waistband.
2. Shirt- long sleeved, cotton or wool. This kept the arms protected and cool. Most had a button placket, but not all the way down; fewer buttons to lose and more comfortable when tucked in. Cowboys wore shirts buttoned up to the neck.
3. Vest- Because of the lack of pockets in shirts and pants, a vest gave the cowboy extra storage space for a watch, tobacco, a sweetheart's photo, and money. Usually made of wool, it gave an extra layer of warmth in the winter.

4. Boots- Made of tough leather, for protection of the feet and ankles, and for riding in a saddle. The narrow toe fit through the stirrup and the high heels kept the boot from sliding forward.

5. Hat- Adapted from the Spanish sombrero, the hat had a wide brim, tall crown, and often a strap to hold it on. The hat was a tool to protect from the sun and rain, to gather water or food items, to fan a fire and to cover the cowboy's face while sleeping.

6. Chaps- Made of tough leather, they were worn for protection in rough country from rocks, branches, or the longhorns of cattle. They also offered a layer of warmth in the winter.

7. Gloves- Similar to the chaps, except for the hands. Offered protection from ropes, reins, hooves, and hot irons. The fringe was a fancy touch but also aided water in running off the glove. Cuffs gave extra protection and kept the sleeves clean.

8. Oil skin Coat or Duster- Either a lightweight duster or rain slicker, which was split up the back for a rider. It would be worn for extra protection from the wind, rain, dust storms, etc. A heavier coat would be worn in the winter. Contrary to what you see in the movies, cowboys didn't wear dusters while walking the streets for a showdown, or to look "cool." The dusters were cumbersome while walking, and were meant to be worn when riding to offer protection to both rider and horse.

9. Bandana- a large piece of cloth that served a number purposes; to protect from dust, wind, rain, and sun; to wet and cool the neck; to chase flies away; to tie on hat in wind; as a bandage; as a water filter; or to add a flash of color when going to town. Silk or cotton were popular, in solids or calico prints.

10. Spurs and Quirt- Spurs were made of plain metal or fancy silver, with a large rowel to roll up and down the flank of the horse. The quirt was hand braided of leather, rawhide or horse hair. They were used to get the horses' attention. These items were especially useful when saddling and riding a stubborn horse first thing in the morning.

11. Lariat- called a reata, it was made of braided rawhide, then later manila hemp. Nowadays waxed nylon ropes are most common. The loop with the leather patch is called the "honda" and "burner." Roping skills were extremely important to a cowboy.

12. Saddlebags- The cowboys' luggage; a place to store food, utensils, extra clothing, pistol and bullets, medical supplies, tools and items for repairing equipment, books, money, maps, etc. Made of plain or tooled leather with metal buckles.

13. Canteen- it was a long, hot and dry distance between watering holes and often the water was contaminated or poisoned on purpose. A canteen held enough water for the cowboy and sometimes his horse. Canteens were made of metal, wood or animal skins covered with wool cloth or canvas.

14. Bedroll- tied behind the saddle during the day, it was a canvas covered blanket or quilt. It served as a mattress, clothes press and duffel bag while on the trail.

15. Carbine- a short rifle

16. Bridle- part of the tack or harness on a horse consisting of headstall, bit and reins.
17. Knife- an instrument used for cutting, consisting of a thin, sharp-edged metal blade fitted with a handle.
18. Saddle- a seat for a cowboy on the back of the horse.

Procedure:

1. Start the lesson with cowboy songs playing in the background. Divide into groups of 3 or 4. Each group brainstorms everything they know about cowboys. Create a list with a five minute limit. Meanwhile, the teacher will dress in cowboy attire or display the authentic cowboy clothing. After each group has their list, a student from each group will come to the board and write their list, simultaneously. Teacher and students will compare lists and discuss them. Following this discussion, the teacher introduces the purpose and necessity of each article through the vocabulary list.
2. Add-a-Word Poetry: This can be done individually, in groups or as a class. Create a poem describing the cowboy. Example:

A Cowboy
A bowlegged cowboy
A dirty, bowlegged cowboy
A tired, dirty, bowlegged cowboy
A singing, tired, dirty, bowlegged cowboy.
A dusty, singing, tired, dirty, bowlegged cowboy.
A Cowboy

In each line of the poem, a new word is added and the rest is repeated. This poem can be long or short, depending on the student's ability and the time availability. If desired, students may create a drawing depicting their poem.

3. Read the article "Dressed for the Occasion" from the Cobblestone book included in the trunk. Play Concentration with cards you have prepared. (copy off of pages 6-11, not back-to-back, one set for each group, partner or individual.) Students match cowboy gear to the price of the gear.
4. Arrange the students into a circle (campfire idea). Discuss the practical and recreational uses of music in a cowboy's life on the range (singing kept the cows calm, kept the cowboys awake, and identified the location of the cowboy during night guard.) Possible songs are included.

Extended Activities:

1. Provide a saddle (or worksheet of a saddle) and discuss its parts.
2. Invite a Grant-Kohrs speaker to present the life history of the cowboy.
3. Plan a field trip to Grant-Kohrs Ranch.

Assessment:

1. Use a pocket chart to check the students' knowledge of the cowboy gear vocabulary. Pass out a pocket card to each child and have the students find the match to their card and place it in the pocket chart. Example: Saddlebags -matches with- cowboy's luggage to store food and tack.
2. Pass out a variety of "cowboy situations" he may encounter on the range. Have the students draw and/or write what the cowboy would be wearing. Example: Winter blizzard -the cowboy may have layers of clothing and his bandana pulled up over his nose.

Situations: winter blizzard, dust storm, hot summer day, typical spring day, cool fall morning, night guard, rainy day